CHAPTER XVIII

ART

CONTRARY to an impression widespread in the West, China is a land of beauty. Hills and mountains, valleys and gorges, some of them of surpassing grandeur, characterize much of her landscape. For those who have ever felt her charm, China holds an inescapable fascination. In spite of the grey, dusty plains of her North, the dirt of many of her streets, the poverty of her masses, and the disrepair into which the relics of her past have often been allowed to drift, she casts her spell over those who are long within her borders and are at all sensitive to beauty. No one who has travelled much in China can easily escape the haunting memories of sights and sounds which have stirred him to the depths—the glow of the sunset on distant bare peaks, thundercaps over mountains and fertile plains, evening twilight on a pagoda-crowned hill above the quiet reaches of a river, the solid lines of an ancient city wall, the boom of a distant temple bell coming through the stillness of the night, the antiphonal, wordless chanting of laboring coolies in the drowsy heat of a summer afternoon, the sweep 01 the Yangtze, the glimpse of a monastery half-hidden in a wooded glen, the charm of an old painting which a succession of faithful hands now long since gone have handed down through many generations, the well-proportioned contours of a garden, or the impressively silent courts and magnificent, time-mellowed colors of the palaces of Peiping.

In earlier chapters we have recorded something of the history of Chinese art and have noted how varied and rich has been that phase of the culture of the Empire. We have seen, too, that art has been by no means uniform either in quality or in characteristics, but that it has had distinct periods. Here, as in so many